

Hello,  
My name is Ahmed Jamal Jones (Aj) and I am a singer/songwriter (recording artist). I have been pursuing my musical career since the age of four and during the day, I work for the Recording Industry Association of America in Washington DC.

I am an independent artist. Although I would probably enjoy making a contribution to the Recording Industry as an artist, I have never worked in partnership with a Recording Label.

I have appeared in over 1,000 performances nationally and have a large catalog which would also include symphonic and orchestral works written during college where I majored in Piano and Minored in Music Composition. The bulk of my catalog consists of Pop/Rock songs.

Since I have no access to commercial radio, I have no hit songs but a few minor accomplishments:

I have performed at the Kennedy Center with my own jazz trio. My former rock group won the Sam Goody Best Unsigned Band In America (1998) and I have been featured in several national music magazines and press journals including Gig, Guitar, Music Connection and The Washington Post and i've won several other contests.

Currently, i'm preparing my next set of songs for release to the public through the internet with several of the P2P networks.

My experience with radio:

My former group hired an independent promoter to promote one of our releases to college radio. While we we're successful in charting on approximately 50 stations throughout the nation, this did not translate into any royalties from our performing rights organization. What was most interesting about this, is that on our previous release, we did generate royalties calling college stations the previous year on our own. The cost of all the calls and mailings to our group as a business was \$4,000 (+).

I have also performed at a few free shows hosted by radio in exchange for a mention of the groups name on the air. None of our songs were performed on commercial radio with the exception of a late night program that played us on the local airwaves show at Midnight at the end of the month on a Tuesday.

While the stations in my area do play local artists occasionally, it is usually on the local artist shows.

If I had to say local radio served the community by offering the same amount of exposure to a local act as they do the national acts with \$upport, I would say local radio is not doing the local community an adequate job.

However, as I understand songs are essentially "BOUGHT" onto commercial radio, I do understand the practice and do not find the practice completely unreasonable.

In my opinion, the FCC should first define local programming to see how it can best suit the needs of those in the community fairly. At the moment, programming is centralized regionally by the corporations with my own assumptions about MTV being a contributing factor but always with the

economic focus taking precedence over local, regional or even international content.

It would seem that a balance could be found between serving the needs of the public and maintaining the economic interests of the broadcasters as well.

From my own perspective, artists and others who are doing business in the local community should have the option of being able to compete locally.

Without it, we are forced to explore other options or abandon the business entirely.

This is a difficult question to answer but if decisions to programming aren't made locally, it would be hard to consider it, local programming wouldn't it? I'm not going to say local decisions are the best choices but for those who actually live in the local communities, they should have a reasonable ability to voice their interests.

I would not object to a station that caters to the concerns of each region that includes news, sports, access for local artists, etc but if something like this were done, would it be done based on the city, town, tiny communities that underlie the larger populations?

Even if the local population would key into a service of this type, if the key that drives this type of model turns out to be economically driven, which most high school football teams, local artists and some areas that are not as densely populated, can afford or contribute to, then its not doing anyone in the "local" communities any good.

Maybe the question here should be, why shouldn't station participation in local communities count? Again, based on the economics of the model and the illustrations you use here (banks, corporations and local businesses), entities that are already supported by capital, they might not see the benefit from it but if a radio station were to support a charity group short of funds or a high school with a fundraising idea for a school trip, the needs of the community could be quite beneficial.

I have engaged in what is now known as the legalized form of payola although on a much smaller scale. I hired an indie promoter, he made phone calls requesting colleges to play my songs for the month of July (while college was out) and it worked. The campaign continued through November and while it was nice to see the groups name appear in the CMJ, it did absolutely nothing for our career. Even more disheartening was the fact that while we were able to buy our way onto smaller college stations, we we're unable to buy our way onto larger college stations (just like in the corporate system) nor use the interest we had from the stations where ever we did happen to be played, to move into a broader commercial radio format.

Total cost, 4 grand. The major labels will spend an entry of \$250,000 A SONG. Some of the money goes to indie promoters but I would suggest looking at any large broadcasters Quarterly Reports for revenue from radio ads. Its not too hard to tell where a large portion of those "advertising dollars come from" and unfortunately, citizens in the local community cannot compete with the Best Buys and Epic Records of the world for advertising or airplay.

Personally, I don't have a problem with payola as long as its affordable. Perhaps someone could explain why it costs \$250,000 to press play on a cd

deck to spin a new song? Or why the limit on the number of new songs introduced annually on a broadcasters station, is so small?

If the FCC would like to serve the interests of its citizens and corporations (at least in the music world because that is what I know intimately) the practice of payola needs to be taken seriously. I'm not offering suggestions, but artists with limited capital, trying to be heard, not competing but utilizing local radio as a form of promotion to drive other sources of revenue so that ideally, they can be heard by the same potential audience have no options. Local artists are shut out of the airwaves locally or otherwise because of payola and as a result, I can illustrate what is currently happening.

Artists and small business owners (myself included) are bypassing these tightly controlled oligopolies, that have been created unfairly, by utilizing whatever means we have at our disposal. This would include internet and Satellite Radio (until that gets bought out) but to a large extent, members of the artistic community are distributing their work, news, sporting events, photos, etc over the internet with P2P networks such as Kazaa, Grokster, Morpheus, Limewire, Bit Torrent, etc.

Payola or a paid form of paying for airplay is not a bad idea. However, payola as a way of shutting out the competition or as a way of driving a revenue model that the local community cannot afford is completely unacceptable. Examination of the sponsorship rule should also be addressed. So should certain corporations who use their leverage to get artists to perform in certain markets or artists who can't fill their venues because they don't have access to the airwaves to develop awareness to begin with but it cannot be overemphasized enough of the importance that radio plays to the development of artists, locally, regionally, nationally or otherwise.

Without radio, revenues from recording sales that have developed and sustained the industry would be non existant, as well as the majority of those artists who are now household names. These catalogs currently keep the recording industry on life support but it is not likely they would have developed into such tremendous assets without having been promoted by way of payola.

Announcers... Is this reverse payola? Did the broadcasters decide in the boardroom "let's pay ourselves by not having to pay local employees?"

Aside from being very deceptive to the nation, paying the announcer who does manage to keep the job by giving him/her less money just to keep the costs down may be a valid business excuse but does little to serve the local community.

If it is the broadcasters obligation to serve the public by serving local interests, the glass should stand right side up instead of upside down.

The FCC should be aware that local artists are NOT represented and need only ask local artists in each city across the country. The occasional artist who is somehow "discovered" by radio in each local region and receives an insignificant amount of airtime or "makes it through the cracks" in some type of competition (usually, a radio station Battle of the Bands) does not show how corporate radio owners are working to serve individuals across the country but why would they?

These corporations are driven by profits which is not necessarily the problem since this is America. The problem is the inability of local artists to compete or having our options legislated out of existence by their non profit lobbying arms.

National playlists limit consumer choices to access, local artists ability to SURVIVE and if you really want to chew on something, from a high level point of view, the government is losing an untold amount of revenue on dollars that could be generated by allowing more selection. More content, less costs, more profit.

Radio unquestionably drives the sales of products but using music as our example in today's marketplace, another reason less music is being sold (aside from prices that don't equate to value, counterfeiting and internet piracy) is less access to more options which I see/hear every single day.

LPFM: This is speculative but as an alternative to more populated areas, it might make some sense in the short term but terrestrial radio might only be able to service the public as long as broadband, cable and satellite technologies have not reached a high level of penetration domestically.

As an artist, I can see the benefits, especially if it catches on, to develop your audience or business locally if the LPFM stations could sustain themselves which I interpret to mean as local investment. I think artists would be willing to support something like this to begin their careers and use that to catapult them to reach a national audience with satellite or globally with the internet for a fraction of the investment it would take on the tradition radio formats.

Thank you for allowing artists such as myself an opportunity to share with you, our thoughts and concerns. I hope my comments do not seem to be patronizing because while I do see problems under the current system, I cannot also fault a system that has brought me, as well as others countless years of enjoyment and useful information. I think having a forum like this to address all of the concerns of artists is a wonderful start and I hope that if the FCC does decide to take action, that you also discuss these concerns with the broadcasters who I do not fault for trying to make a buck and improve the bottom line. Many artists would probably gladly contribute to the broadcasters profit if they could afford to do so which would help these artists (small businesses) create more jobs as their businesses grow and make a greater contribution to society as well.

All the best,

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